

THE BASIC SPIRITUAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE RELIGION OF THE CHIANG.*

T. TORRANCE.

174 In my research work among the Chiang tribesmen in the N. W. of Szechwan I early came to the conclusions; (1) that they came originally from somewhere in Asia Minor, and (2) that their Old-Testament pattern of religion represented an early patriarchal type, known to the Hebrews before their settlement in the holy land, and followed by them more or less after arrival there. To this opinion we still mainly adhere. Though much more has been learnt in recent years about their customs and ritual nothing has come to light to change this view in any radical sense.

[197] It is known that they speak a language allied to that of the Tibetans, Chiarong and Nosh. The presumption is that they are of one stock. But, nevertheless, they have certain racial characteristics of their own. They are finer in physique and frequently show Semitic features of countenance which these races fail to do. Many of their customs, too, indicate a closer affinity to those of the Hebrews. Even if it be asserted that the Tibetans and Chiarong came also from the West—which we believe—yet, because of these facts, caution is needed before sweepingly including them in the same racial stock as these three races. The Chiang is a sort of a Jew among our West China peoples. You can scarcely hide him even when his blood has been mingled with a strain of Chinese. He has a way with him, an appearance and a religious outlook that marks him out from others around him.

We admit we have been criticised for doubting the classification. But the language test does not always hold. There are many races talking English to-day who cannot be called Anglo-Saxon. Did the Chiang always speak the language they do to-day? He would be bold who asserted they did without sufficient proof of the same. The suspicion is strong that they did not. To-day, as we hear more of their wonderful religion this suspicion may grow stronger than ever.

000 What then is the nature of the Chiang religion? It is simply that of the olden-time worship in the high-places. We know that this was followed by the nations of Canaan and after their day by

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A Ch'lang woman carrying water.



The wife of the chief of the Ch'lang
at Lifan.

770 the Israelites themselves up to the time of the captivity. If opinion does differ somewhat as to the exact character it assumed, whether among the Canaanites or the Israelites, the fact remains that they both did worship the Deity or deities in such sanctuaries.

The Canaanites had their mountain groves or high-places with a stone pillar or pillars in each, a tree or sacred pole, an altar and carved images of their gods. This is borne out from the command of Moses to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 12; 3: "Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: and ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place." Then in Deuteronomy 16; 21 a further command is given: "thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the Lord thy God hateth." The Israelites to begin with obeyed these commands, but worship in high places persisted. The prophet Samuel sacrificed there. The sanctuary at Gibeon, where Solomon once offered a thousand offerings, was called a high place. And the godly King Jehoshaphat, who turned not aside from what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet did not hinder the people from burning incense in the high places. The Israelites, however, in times of religious relapse so restored the Canaanitish manner of worship that Ashera, the Hebrew term for grove, came to represent as well the images and pillars introduced therein.

778 The Chiang make no representation, carved or hewn, of Deity
171 but they publicly worship Him in a sacred grove high up on a mountain side or a mountain top. In the grove there is a sacrificial altar built of unhewn stones. Behind the altar grows a sacred tree which is an essential part of the sanctuary. Between the tree and the altar, or on the altar, stands a white stone of glistening purity, generally of quartz. Such a grove it will be noted is more elaborate in its contents than that recognised by the orthodox Israelites; yet has nothing of the corruption of that of the Canaanites. Essentially, this mode of worship, it will not be denied, suggests oneness of origin with both Canaanite and Hebrew, and brings down to us, does it not, a primitive form of Semitic worship in the dress of hoary antiquity? Doubtless the Canaanites did not originally have the corruptions that later characterised their groves and called forth the divine displeasure. Their cult, apparently, was a mixture of Semitic observance and Sumerian superstition.
776 The Chiang, more honourable than the Canaanites, have maintained their monotheism comparatively unsullied, and have given us an example of religious constancy to be found, apart from the Jews, in no other people.

THE RELIGION OF THE CHIANG

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778 The use of a sacred White Stone is a leading feature of Chiang worship. It is set up both in the groves and on the roofs of their houses. In the grove it stands above the altar of sacrifice; on the roof it is placed over the middle of the battlement above the back wall. The Deity is not supposed to reside therein and it is not, therefore, worshipped. The Stone is sacred, in the first place, because of its whiteness. Whiteness betokens goodness in contrast to blackness, which betokens evil. Its colour thus symbolises the holiness of God who hates evil and loves good. It is sacred, secondly, because it reminds men that he is the natural Rock or Mount of their strength. That God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and that he is the Rock Source of all good and blessing, constitute the twin fundamental tenets of their belief.

778 The Stone requires to be conical or mount-like in shape and set up as found in its natural or unchiselled state. Occasionally small white stones are placed around its base but these have no religious meaning. The significance of the Stone itself is the continual intimation it makes that God may only be approached by the way of holiness, and is only found when men respond to this demand of his character. As a monument on the house top it bears an unambiguous witness that those who dwell under it are a people who recognise the God of Heaven as their God, and are willing to serve him according to the immemorial customs of their fathers.

776 It will be seen from this that the religion of the Chiang is not one of stone-worship. To speak of it as such is to talk at random and gives a misleading impression. Some who want to believe that it is, because the affirmation sounds sensational, are the worst offenders. They prate about the White Stone worship but they have nothing to support the assertion except ignorant hear-say, or wilful misrepresentation. The Chiang are not animists. They know whom they worship and they do not worship him ignorantly. This requires to be said because already it has been stated far and wide that the Chiang worship the White Stone. A foreign journal once announced that the tribes people worshipped a white stone. The news was sensational; that was the effect desired. Truth, therefore, went by the board. Now, litholatry is a big word. It has a scientific or learned sound. The mere use of it is supposed to be ample proof that the Chiang are litholatrists, and the proving of this is necessary to be able to say they are animists—another big word. The Israelites had two sacred stones in their Holy of holies. Were they litholatrists? They lifted up their eyes unto the hills from whence came their help. Did they worship the hills? Did they not expressly state at the same time that their help came from Jehovah who made the Heaven and the earth? Let us be as just to the Chiang as we are to the Israelites.

It is useless to say that one was told by the Chinese that the Chiang worshipped the White Stone. The Chiang themselves deny

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A Ch'iang village.

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A road in the Ch'iang country.

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776 that they do. This should be enough. At the same time some of the ignorant among them may say that the White Stone is their "Pu-sa." Yet the same man tells you that he worships God and none other. In his mind there is no contradiction. The fault is yours if you fail to understand him. Certain words to him have a different meaning than to you. He speaks Chinese as a secondary language. Then he is talking down to you. He is pitying your ignorance and with his imperfect Chinese gives a wrong impression to the listener who has not wit enough to understand this. For instance, a tribesman may call his photograph his "pu-sa." But he knows enough that it is only a likeness. Though he uses this name for it that would not justify any one saying he worshipped himself, i.e. his own likeness, and is therefore, to be scientifically classed as an animist.

OTO Sacred stones in primitive times were very common. They were used in many different places in many different ways. In some instances they appear to have been worshipped. Few doubt that the Canaanites did. But no true Israelites did. The interest to us of the Chiang use of the White Stone is in the reflex light it throws on the use of memorial and covenant stones by the Hebrews. Jacob set up the stone that served as his pillow to mark the site where Jehovah appeared to him in promise and blessing. There he made his vow and from there he started on his journey with the assurance that the all-seeing eye of a gracious Providence watched over him for good. The stone was a mark, a memorial and a sign of his vow. For to him Heaven had opened in that place, and it was given him to see there a ladder of intercourse between earth and Heaven, very dreadful but very reassuring. We shall yet see that the Chiang hold almost identical views regarding their Stone which brings into fine relief those of the patriarchs.

776 Jacob in his dying blessing to Joseph spoke of the Mighty
171 One of Jacob who caused his bow to abide in strength and made his arms strong when he was grieved and shot at by his persecutors. The God of his father "from whence came the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, should help him and bless him with the blessing of Heaven above and of the deep that croucheth beneath." Obviously in Jacob's mind the Shepherd of Israel and Stone at Israel were one. In his own case he speaks of this Shepherd and Stone as the Angel who redeemed him from all evil. It was he who spoke to him in Paran; He, who as a man, wrestled with him at the Jabbok and by whom he uttered his parting blessings on his sons. The Chiang do not explicitly speak of their Stone as Shepherd or Angel but they do speak of an Angel or God-sent man who acts for them in their approach to God at the altar where the Stone stands. The Chiang and Hebrew concepts are so closely allied that they may be called alike in everything but the terminology.

191 It was on, Sinai, the Mount of cloud and fire that Jehovah
778 revealed himself to the Israelites and made known his Voice to

171 them in The Ten Words. In the song of Moses, Jehovah is
 798 described as "Our Rock." The Rock followed the people in the wilderness and from the rock, water was made to gush forth to supply their needs. A Pillar of cloud guided them by day and a Pillar of fire by night. Joshua on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim respectively set up plastered pillar-monuments of blessing and cursing with the Law written on them. And when he made a covenant with the heads of the nation before his death, he took a great stone as a witness and set it up under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord, in the same fashion as is found in the Chiang country to day. Though the words of Hannah are unknown to the Chiang they yet fully subscribe to them in their thought content: that "there is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside Thee: neither is there any rock like unto our God." (1 Samuel 2; 2).

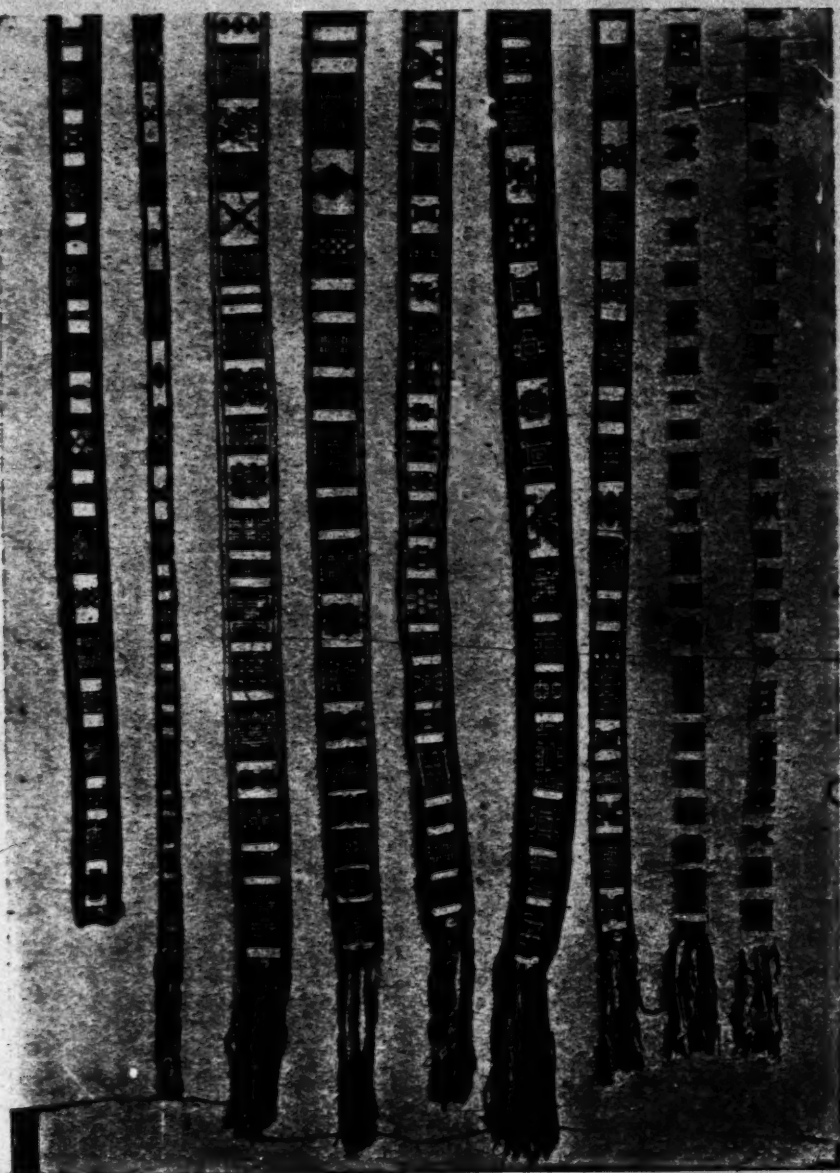
798 The Sacred Tree is another indispensable feature in the religion
 824 of the Chiang. All the trees in the grove are sacred and for this reason none may be cut, but The Tree behind the altar and adjacent to the White Stone is especially sacred. It is the one that gives locality and centralization to worship, even as it is the Whiteness of the Stone that indicates its mode and the altar that gives it reality. What further significance The Sacred Tree once had is not known. It would be easy to surmise that it was regarded as the Tree of Life, but the Chiang, as far as our knowledge goes, say nothing definite of this. They merely declare that it belongs to God. To it may be tied the sacrificial victim before being offered. And it is by way of the Sacred Tree that God comes when he descends from Heaven to meet His people in the Grove and by way of it he ascends again at the conclusion of the offering.

798 On the Chiang house tops we meet the Tree again. A straight
 782 branch is inserted behind the "O-pee" or White Stone. Here
 824 special perforated stone slabs hold it in place. Frequently two others, accompany it, one at either corner of the back parapet. In this way the flat roof takes the character of a private grove for the offering of family sacrifice. After the sacrifice these are left standing and a visitor by their appearance can always tell approximately what length of time has elapsed since the last offering was made.

A white outline of a Tree is not uncommonly drawn on the outside wall of a house. Drawn thus it is a symbol of blessing and prosperity. He who seeks God finds grace and worldly favour for he is the Author of all good.

800 Among the Chinese in Western China a symbolical tree with figures on either side was once in use. We have seen the portraiture on tomb bricks of the Han dynasty, on a sarcophagus and on ancient bronze mirrors. Where the idea originated or what it represents can only be surmised. To Westerners it suggests the Genesis story. Did the Chinese borrow it, one asks, from the Chiang?

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Ch'iang belts. Obverse. From the West China Union University Museum.

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778 The altar is the third great requisite in Chiang worship.
 191 Often it is a platform of earth faced with natural shaped stone. Or it may consist of a slab of stone resting on other stones. But of whatever form, the stone or stones used must remain unhewn. No human shaping is permissible. Any cutting or polishing of the stones defiles them for use in the divine altar.

Occasionally a flat rock *in situ* is utilized. Such, of course, answers the natural requirement. The approach to Deity may not be of human design or of man's invention. The approach is divinely provided apart from the worshipper's help or contrivance.

At the base of Mount Sinai after the reception of the Ten Words, the Israelites had instructions conveyed to them of a corresponding nature. In sacrifice an altar of earth was to be raised, but if stone were used no tool should be lifted upon it, for that should defile it. Here is one of the many touches of intimacy in the practices of the two peoples that call for mutual consideration and comparison.

778 The Grove, the Tree, the White Stone and the Altar together constitute the Chiang sanctuary in the High Place. All are Sacred. One is not without the other. None of them is worshipped but all form essentials in the approach of man to God and of God to man. Account for the origin of these ideas as one may, we cannot deny their existence, or refuse to believe that the Chiang themselves give full credence to the tradition of their divine establishment.

A High Place is not chosen, as might be supposed, merely for its commanding elevation. It is rather chosen because they think of God as dwelling on high in the Heavens; and ascent to his altar gives natural expression of their desire to meet him. Up on the mountain side in the heart of a grove the world is shut out and the soul shut in with God. Nothing intervenes between man and his Creator. Here amid unspoilt surroundings, in the true Sanctuary of nature, the Father Spirit is pleased to meet with the humble suppliants of His grace.

778 Those who doubt this have to explain why the Chiang worship
 782 takes place at night. There is nothing then to be seen but the starry lights of Heaven. Absolute stillness reigns. Distraction is far removed. The whole thought is centred on the act of worship. Only a true seeker after God cares to make the climb. To him the darkness of the night is no deterrent, the risk of inclement weather no hindrance. The securing of the divine Presence is the great quest of his soul. Into his own moral darkness he wants the light of God to shine.

776 The Chiang have two names for God: "Abba Chee" or "The Father Spirit" and "Ma-Be Chee" or "Heavenly spirit". The first is the more common, and beautifully expressive. God is the Father of all personality or spirits of men. How fundamental this is to all true religious belief it only takes an instant to realise, and

776 makes the Christian reflect again how Christ's teaching of God as the Heavenly Father is the beauty and the strength of Christianity. The Chiang idea of God makes a wonderful forerunner to that greater one, which Christ gave to men.

God, in his nature, is thought of as spotless in holiness or purity, and in his character as the righteous governor of the universe. He searcheth the hearts of men. He finds out if they are white or black, i.e. good or evil. To the repentant suppliant he extendeth sacrificial mercy; to the evil doer retribution according to his iniquity.

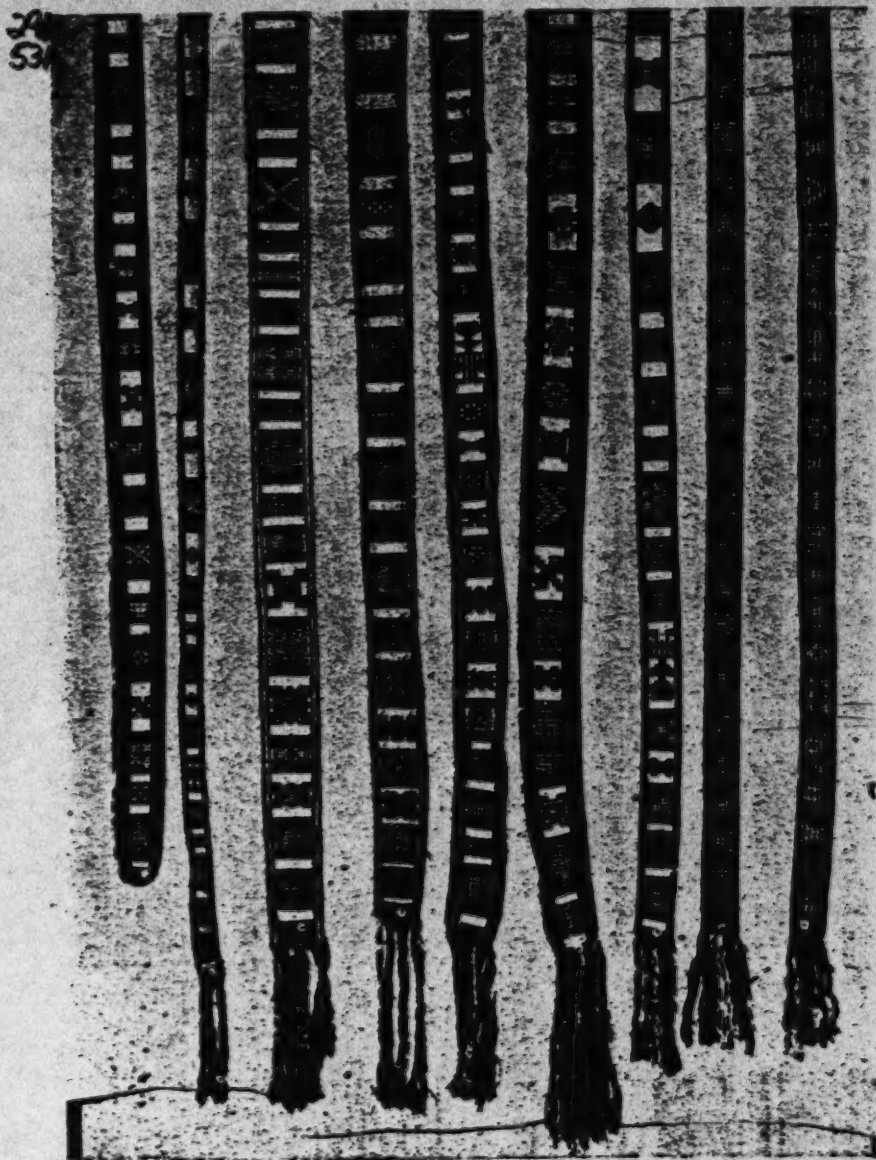
783 The White Stone and the altar provide tangible evidence of these conceptions. Since God is holy, the sinner may not approach him before he is ceremoniously cleansed. A sin-bearer is, therefore, necessary to remove his sin. On it falls the divine judgment. A spotless bullock, or lamb or fowl is the victim. When its blood has been shed the way is open for prayer and supplication.

The origin of this crucial ceremony no Chiang can give. It has been observed, all say, from time immemorial. They regard it as an all-important divine requirement. Aged priests, deep in the religious lore of their race, which is handed down from generation to generation, unanimously maintain this. The whole purpose of sacrifice, they say, is the removal of sin to secure the divine blessing. Its substitutionary character is never questioned but strenuously maintained. Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin, and apart from that even the priests dare not presume to pray.

It is useless for any one to try to discount this belief of theirs. Some who, from prejudice, would fain read out of it this substitutionary meaning charge us with reading into it preconceived ideas of sacrifice taken from the Old Testament. But love of the truth must state exactly what the facts are. And it is not fiction but fact that the Chiang do thus interpret the meaning of their sacrifices. God, they believe, meets them at the altar, and no where else, because there sin is cleansed away.

776 That salvation by substitution happens to be an Old Testament and a New Testament doctrine only enhances the interest of the Christian in the Chiang ritual. Yet the interest or the wonder does not end here. There is something more wonderful still, so 783 wonderful, that at first, one can hardly believe his ears when he is told of it. They solemnly assert that their sacrifices are only provisional: they are but the semblances of a supreme sacrifice yet to come. How can the critic account for this? Let who will question the asseveration, the proof again is overwhelming.

A divine agent is to come from Heaven to be The Great Sin-Bearer. When he appears the reality of their sacrifices will be accomplished. This future Sin-Bearer even now comes as an unseen Presence to the Grove to put through their petitions for



Ch'iang Belts. Reverse. From the West China Union University Museum.

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776 them. He is regarded as the Interpreter of all that takes place in
783 the sacred grove and as The Agent who mediates between them
and God.

776 At every sacrifice, accordingly, the priest has a sacred symbol
776 of his presence, and this symbol is given a personal name. It is
783 a roll of white paper in the form of an ancient book. Every priest
guards his Roll with the most zealous care and regards it with the
utmost veneration. No stranger is allowed to see it and no wor-
shipper may even touch it. Neither will any priest tell an outsider
of its existence. Without the presence of the Roll all sacrifice
would be in vain. For it signifies the virtual Presence of the
Heaven-Sent-One at the altar. Indeed he and the sacrifice are
one.

[212] Originally the Chiang had their own scriptures, or writings.
With the loss of the knowledge of letters, what was once a sacred roll
of their law is now only a mere cylinder of white paper. But it
preserves the form. It represents the reality. This explains their
veneration for it. The roll denotes the spiritual nature of their
offerings to the Father of spirits. They are offerings of righteous-
ness consummated by the Heaven-Sent-One through his death for
man's sin.

That he has to die for this purpose the priests take care to
signify in a very unusual way: a small skull, or death's head, is
inserted in the upper end of the sacred Roll. No one uninitiated in
the mysteries of the white religion would ever guess its meaning
there. A second look has to be taken before indeed it is seen. The
figure of death is embedded in the volume. This intimation is so
plain that it is unmistakable. Even though it be surmised that
the roll was originally without this tangible interpretation of its
meaning, nevertheless the innovation reveals plainly the thought
of the death of the Sin Bearer from Heaven as commonly held by
all Chiang priests.

The writer has one of these rolls with the death's head in his
possession. At the decease of an old priest who had it, a Christian
Chiang secured it for us from his family.

976 The messianic message in the fortieth Psalm strikingly
783 corresponds in thought to this age long aspiration of the Chiang,
as evidenced in their Sacred Roll, and the mind of the man must
191 be very dull that does not marvel at the closeness of the correspon-
dence. "Sacrifice and offering", it says, thou hast no delight in;
mine ears thou hast opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast
thou not required. Then said I, Lo I am come; in the Roll of the
book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea,
thy law is within my heart". (R. V.)

776 The name of the divine Sin Bearer is also arresting: it is so
191 like that of Jesus. The sound varies in different localities but the
correspondence is close. In one place it is "Nee-Dsu", in a second
"Je-Dsu," in a third "Rhe-Dsu" and so on. This can be put

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191 down to coincidence, of course, but its designation can hardly be that. It is known as Abba Malah. Abba means Father: here, the Father in Heaven. Malah is not known other than as a name. They do not seem to be able to define or explain the term. But the pronunciation is very precise. The "lah" is spoken with a definite click, so much so that it is virtually Malak, the Hebrew word for Angel. Have we not in this another strong indication of the Semitic origin of the Chiang religious beliefs?

In connection with this Sacred Roll and angel-Sin-Bearer or Redeemer the student of scripture inevitably recalls the many instances in the Old Testament of the mysterious angel-visitant appearing as God in human form to patriarchs, prophets and saints in times of stress and difficulty. By Isaiah he is called "the Angel of His Presence who saved them": "in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bare them, and carried them all they days of old. (Isaiah, 62; 9). In Malachi, 3; 1, "He is called the Lord whom ye seek, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in."

This delight of the Israelites for their Malak or Messenger of the covenant has a remarkable parallel in the fondness of the Chiang for their Abba Malah or Je-Dsu. They speak of Him in the possessive sense. The prefix of "ga-gee" goes with His name: "Ga-gee Je-Dsu" they say. The sentiment is that of the Christian hymn, "My Jesus I love thee, I know thou art mine."

Among Chiang Christians when the hymn "Jesus loves me" is sung the use of their own name "Je-Dsu" in place of the Chinese "Ye-Su" adds great zest to the singing. Every face then shines—every face is, as it were, a glistening white Stone.

796 At festival times the sacred roll is carried by the priest to the grove on a platter, where its base is embedded or planted in seed wheat. The emphasis is on the seed. The interpretation is not far to find when taken with the use to which this seed wheat is put. It is that death forms the prelude to life, a belief which the Chiang firmly hold. This will become plain as we proceed.

In some places the seed-wheat is carried separately to the grove, but at the grove the sacred roll is placed in it.

Where strict orthodoxy prevails there are three religious festivals in the year. The first occurs at their old New Year time, which falls on the first day of the tenth moon of the Chinese calendar. The second comes in the Summer and the third in the Autumn. But the dates vary according to the locality and even may be changed a little, as exigencies of weather and social conditions indicate.

In numerous places now only one religious festival is held in the year; in other places two. Uniformity has lapsed. Even in exact ritual procedure it is not found. One district has preserved customs and conceptions that another has let go or forgotten.

783 For private sacrifices there is naturally no set time. These

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Ch'iang belts. Reverse. From the West China Union University Museum.

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783 arise with the need or the occasion or the mood of the person offering. But in public or private worship there are extraordinary times when both are conducted on an extended or greater scale.

Public worship takes place in the sacred grove, and each village or set of villages has one of its own. Private worship begins on the house top with sacrifice and is continued in the home below.

783 In all worship a priest invariably officiates. He is essential
783 to its proper conduct. An ordinary individual dare not take the honour on himself of presenting the blood of sacrifice: that is the prerogative of the priest set apart for the purpose. He it is who superintends the whole ritual, checking error, enforcing decorum, explaining its necessity and significance, and leading in the prayers made after the sacrifice.

The office is generally handed down from father to son. One generation initiates another. When the pupil is proficient in the knowledge of the nature and significance of the various rites he will be called on to perform, he undergoes a careful ordination. But he must be able to get married, and the marriage ceremony may be the closing act in the ordination. Single men cannot act as priests, lest taint or aspersion should rest on any one performing this holy office.

The ordination takes place in the grove. For the ceremony all the priests in the neighbourhood assemble. In company with any laity who desire to attend they form a procession that starts up the hillside as dusk draws on. Along the route fowls are sacrificed one after another to ensure a continuous dripping of blood from the start to the finish. Immediately the blood ceases to drip from one fowl it is thrown aside and another killed to maintain the cleansing of the path of the novitiates. It is a strange performance doubtless, only it sets forth in no uncertain way the emphasis that is laid on blood, and hence calculated to make men think of its necessary meaning even while it serves as a shock or challenge to man's aesthetic sense. Which same thing also the Jewish ritual continually did.

On the mountain the probationer bathes in a stream to rid himself of all bodily defilement and dresses himself in cleansed garments. A lamb on the altar is sacrificed in the usual way. The blood is sprinkled on the White Stone, the Sacred Tree, The Altar and all around. Oil or fat is put on the new priests head and the night-long chantings, prayers and drum beatings varied by intervals of rest proceed.

Next day each new priest has a lamb sacrificed on his house-top in front of the White Stone and Sacred Branch. At the conclusion of the accompanying prayers he may don the priestly garments and wear the priest's hat. He is now officially recognised as competent to undertake all sacerdotal duties connected with his office, whether in public or in private offerings.

783 As a priest there is one thing he must not do: he must not change the intention of the sacrifice. Sacrifice may only be made for the one express and divinely ordained purpose of the remission of sin. It can not be turned aside to any other or made to any one but God. His duty is to maintain and enforce this original end, or otherwise he renders himself liable to the penalty of death.

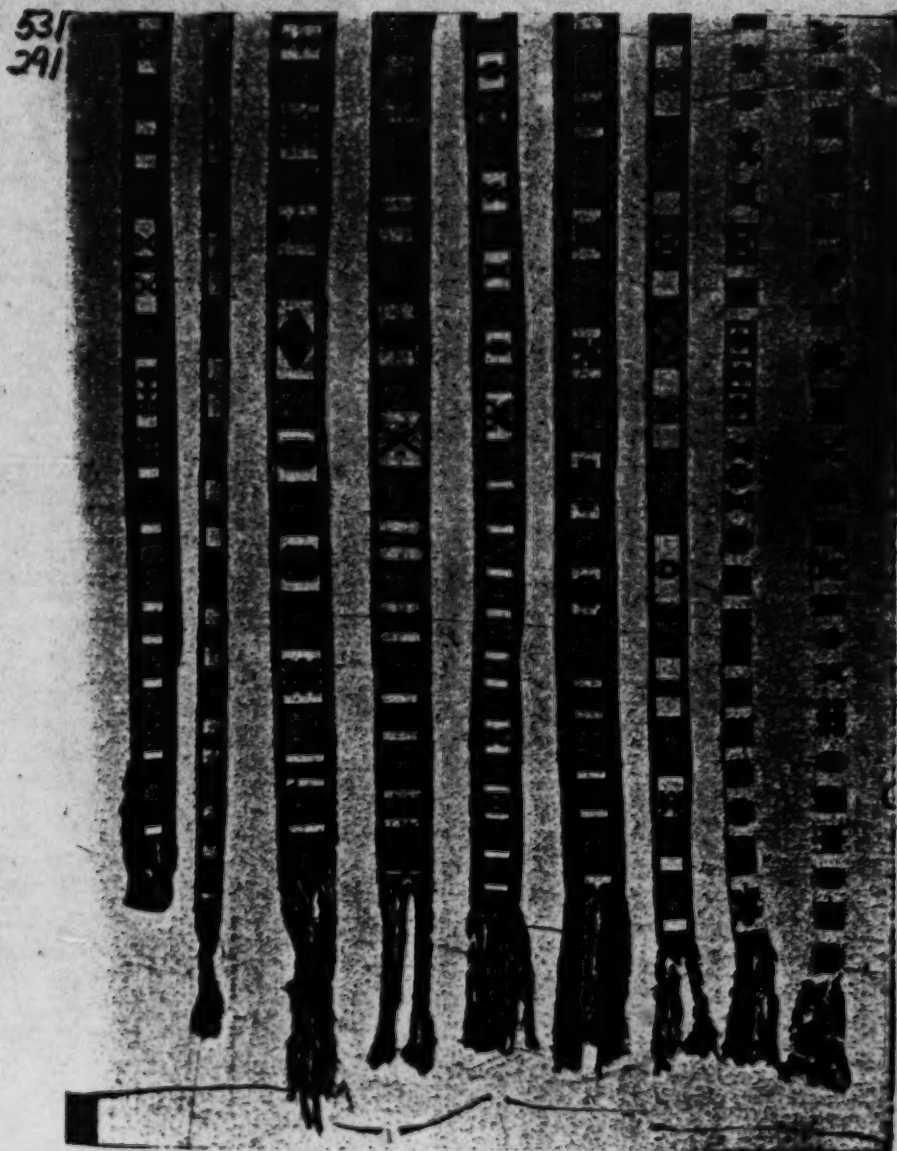
We confess that the first time a priest voluntarily gave us this information we were surprised to the point of wonder, yea, and of admiration. For it revealed to us the intensity of their great central belief that their sacrifices of propitiation were not man-invented but God-born.

Everywhere the same insistence is made on the due order. Their chantings and prayers include an avowal of faithfulness in this respect. God is invoked to remember that the blood of the sacrifice is presented by his set command as made known to their fathers. Simultaneously the ancient priests are cited as witnesses that they have been steadfast to the rule of faith handed down by them.

Once at a High-place sacrifice, friction which arose among the worshippers led to certain irregularities and lack of reverence in the making of the offering. That same year, men noticed that death claimed the majority of the wanton offenders. This may have been a coincidence, of course, but the reason believed was because they sinned with a high hand.

But the surprise created by the staunchness of the Chiang to the faith of their fathers leads to a distinct shock when it is seen that the priests have allowed strange accretions and realistic amplifications to creep into parts of their ritual and profession which degrade its pristine purity. For instance the skull in the sacred roll obviously is an innovation to give it a dramatic presentation. [793] The horned skin cap of the priest is declared to have replaced by a plain shaped felt one with a circular brim. And a number of priests, not all, have copied some of the customs of the Chinese exorcist. 050 Worst of all, spiritism, in some parts with its customary admixture of real phenomenae and base trickery, has crept in. The investigator, even while he laments these excesses, has to take note of them. All is not pure gold that glitters. There may an alloy in it or it may be a base metal of the same colour. One has to distinguish and care is needed at every turn. Patience and caution are often necessary to disentangle the real from the simulation and what constitutes the old true-Chiang religion from its present day admixture of spurious elements.

177 It has to be remembered that during the reign of the Emperor Chien Long, A. D. 1736-1796 the Chiang suffered complete loss of political liberty. Then idolatry was forced on them at the point of the sword. Temples, never before seen on their mountain sides and plateaus, were wantonly built all through their territory. Since then a slow decadence has been noted in their worship. The



Ch'iang Woven Belts, reverse.

From the West China Union University Museum.

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old zeal and fire have insensibly diminished. Even in the present generation we ourselves have watched this decline make definite progress. Old priests from whom we learnt much of what is here given have died off, and their successors, while performing the motions of the ritual, have not shown half the knowledge of its inner meaning their sires did. Their surroundings have not lent them the inspiration they required to maintain the old time brilliancy of their religion.

With regard to the spiritism adopted in some quarters, the young priests are alleged to pass through a trance at their initiation. A spirit then is supposed to possess them, taking complete possession for the time being of their faculties. After this possession is over they are physically limp or half-exhausted until their strength is regained.

On the other hand, it is alleged that this is not always the case. The possession by the spirit is not real but simulated. An old priest instructs them how to feign the usual phenomena so that their reputation should not come behind others in having authority over occult powers.

Such as do have real experience with spirits profess to be able to call up these unseen personalities at will. By ways known to themselves they secure their aid or release from harmful influences. After a death, if the priest be up to his job, the spirit can lead back the departed soul under leash to his old home for a visit in a manner similar to the way shown in street processions of the actors of the Buddhist temple of hell.

In one district the priests carry, hung from their girdles, a bunch of ludicrously weird objects called the *Te-sa-a-ga*. Anything that is curious or strange enough or suggestive may find a place in the collection. Together they make a rare rattle for the ignorant and the gullible. You may see an eagle's bill, a cock's foot, a wild boar's tusk, a goat's horn, a bit of bone, a cymbal, deer's teeth, a Chinese charm cash, or a rare shell. Each object proclaims the exorcist powers of its possessor. With these by his side no one can doubt his ability to recall the soul in sickness, undo demoniac powers and save you in general from the evil eye.

Incidentally they prove a god-send to the sensationalist wise-acre. With these to shake in front of his audience, who dare doubt now that the Chiang are litholatrists, animists and demon worshippers! Seeing is believing? His case is proven. And he struts around as pleased with himself as the man who wears the lot at his belt.

He, however, who knows something of the genius of the beautiful old Chiang religion groans within himself at the sight of such things. How have the best become the worst? The *Te-sa-a-ga*, once pure as the morning light, has fallen from its high estate. We believe we hold the key to its primitive significance but must meanwhile wait before giving its solution. Sufficient here to say

That the presence of these oddities and occult claims does not lessen our admiration for the better class of priests who despise the use of such fraudulent practices in their profession. They refuse to stoop to these mountebank tricks and schemes for the sake of gain but trust to the all-merciful power of a benign God to meet the ills and needs of men. To them God is very real.

793 Few priests to-day wear a distinctive dress. There used to be priestly sacrificial garments; there is one in the West China Union University Museum, which we procured for it. This one shows a kind of back-plate ornament which is peculiar. Of its significance we remain so far in entire ignorance and until we find a clue there is no use making a guess at it. Nowadays priests mostly perform their sacrificial duties clad in the common white robe of the worshippers.

796 At the sacrifice in the grove only men are allowed to attend.
793 Mixed worship is forbidden. Distance is no excuse, and nothing
562 save bodily infirmity may deter the heads of households from being present. Worship is congregational and not to take part makes one a religious reprobate.

796 Elders or leaders of good repute are appointed in turns to see
793 to all the necessary arrangements. It falls to them to select the
ram or he-goat. This is done ten days ahead of time. It must
[223] be perfect in every part, body, legs and horns. And it must be white. If a wholly white animal cannot be found, a white cock is offered to atone for any spot or imperfection in colour. It is led home the day before and washed. To augment its cleansing it is next bathed in incense which is of cypress twigs. Then it is tethered in a clean place until wanted.

A new and unused rope is used to lead it to the altar. The rope, too, has to pass through the sanctifying fumes of the incense, and afterwards it may not be used for any profane purpose. A special honour rests on the person chosen to lead the victim to the grove. He is always some one reckoned worthy among his brethren. It falls to him to slay the sacrifice, and he receives an extra portion of the divided meat.

Three days beforehand the worshippers cleanse their bodies, wash their clothes and make themselves ready. No pungent herbs such as garlic or onions may be eaten then or anything regarded as unclean. Even smoking is meantime prohibited. If possible, all go clothed in white. The very poor may wear
[223] dyed garments if they are cleansed and they have no other.

The road along which the victim is led to the grove only the worshippers may tread. No others that day may appear thereon, for that day it is sacred. Should any one inadvertently be met on it he must offer a special sacrifice to make amends for his trespass.

No outsiders are permitted to witness the New Year sacrifice. No Chiang even who are not participants are allowed near. The roads and approaches to the grove are carefully guarded against

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1933 casual visitors or curious spying. None are supposed to approach the holy place except sharers in the sacrificial offering.

The procession towards the grove begins about nine or ten o'clock at night. The white clad participants carry torches or lanterns. One carries the sacred roll reverently on a basin or platter of wheat seed. This, at least, is the custom in some parts. In others the wheat seed is taken separately in the priest's pouch to the grove and then poured around the sacred roll on the basin or platter. A halt is made before arrival to re-sanctify the lamb. Water is now, curiously, poured into or over its ears, over its back and legs as a sort of baptismal ceremony. Note is taken whether the animal, under the douching, shakes itself or not. If it does, that is taken as a sign of its fitness; if not, it is unhesitatingly rejected. Naturally a healthy lamb does shake itself and the ritual goes on. A third cleansing or sanctification of the lamb is gone through on its arrival at the grove.

The rule in every observance is, "holiness unto Abba Chee." Worshippers, vessels, utensils must be cleansed. The lamb requires to be perfect. God is a God of purity. Nothing evil or unclean can come before him. Heaven is a pure land. They who seek life there and the divine blessing here cannot obtain such apart from sacrificial purification. These repeated cleansings leading up to it all signify this ultimate purpose in the Chiang worship.

A white banner with a miniature bow and arrow on it is raised on the altar. The white roll is placed directly before the White Stone. A large cake of unleavened bread and a jar of wine are placed beside it. The priest takes his station. A fire is lit in the centre of the open space. These preliminaries over, the ritual begins.

Its opening is announced by the discharge of a small three chambered gun, used only for this purpose. The gun originally was of brass. The writer has part of an ancient one in his possession. Now they are made of iron.

The worshippers now kneel together as the priest begins his chants and prayers. He keeps time with a small drum. Je-Dsu, the angel overseer of all that is done, looks down to see that the hearts of those present are sincere. If not, the reputed punishment is liability to transfixion by a "brazen" arrow from heaven. A special awe, therefore, rests on every worshipper.

At the conclusion of the initiatory chants a remarkable ceremony takes place. The priest or "Be-bo" burns incense of cypress twigs and enshrouds the White Stone in a cloud of fiery smoke. The background established, he, removes the rope from the lamb. The rope is wound around the vessel that to receive the blood. He and the elders now kneel and place their hands on the head of the victim. Afterwards all who have specially prepared themselves do the same.

796 After this solemn act of the transference of their sin to the
 783 lamb he recites an intercessory prayer. It begins with a triple ascription to God and goes on to invoke him to see and hear that they have assembled to offer sacrifice. He pleads that, "The offering of a lamb has been perpetuated from of old and the paying of vows from former generations. To offer sacrifice is not our invention, it was established in ancient times. This altar of the Most High opens the gate of heaven and the way of sacrifice. It leads men to pay their vows. The leader of the lamb has brought it thither. One hundred and ninety-two pairs of white banners show forth the purity of the altar, and signify that God is pleased to accept the offering. "O ye our ancient priests witness that our offering is very pure, and that it is not our own instituting, but has been from of old. In paying our vows we have eaten nothing offensive for three days, nor gone to any unclean place. We have come to the sacred grove; we have placed in position the vessel for the blood; we have led the lamb thither; we have untied the rope and bound it around the basin; the arrow of the bow we now unloose; we slay the lamb on this floor; O God of heaven come down, come down as we offer it to thee. Thou Yather of Spirit come to our grove. If our garments were not clean we would not dare to wear them; if our shoes were not clean we would not dare to put them on; if our hats were not clean we would not dare to use them; if our backs were not clean we would not dare to bear the drum; if our hearts were not sincere we would not dare to pay these vows or pray these prayers. The grass is in the blood basin; the bread and wine we have brought to our God; Oh, regard the slayer of the lamb and the priest as without sin and undo the sin of all present. We sprinkle the blood to atone for our iniquities; O God accept our sacrifice."

The arrow is now removed from the bow on the White Banner and the lamb slain.

The original practice was to kill the lamb by a brazen arrow, this being the symbol of judgment. But now a knife, the property of the priest, is used. On the handle glitters a white stone or a white bone ornament. The priest hands the knife to the leader of the lamb. The lamb's head is drawn against some one's knee. Another grasps its legs firmly. One thrust of the knife is made and the blood flows into a basin. With a wisp of grass it is sprinkled on the altar with its bread and wine and through the cloud on the White Stone and White Banner and on all sides.

The White Banner with its arrow spent is immediately removed and inserted beside the White Stone because the White Stone is the emblem of the divine holiness.

The action denotes that this is an offering in righteousness. That which their Abba Chee desires is presented before Him. Their plea for mercy is the spent arrow. For in its discharge sin was judged. Since punishment has been meted out to sin, as evidenced

796 by the blood they sprinkle before him, they now ask for the remission of iniquity and transgression, which the goodness of God directed them to seek.

795 A paring from the hoof, the ears and the genital parts of the victim are burned on the altar, apparently as an act of consecration. The undivided horns are presented, but afterwards taken home. An ear is placed on the point of a staff and set up. The head, heart, liver and kidneys, with the flesh of the animal are consumed by fire.

The priest at sacrifices, other than the New Year sacrifice, which is the greatest of all, receives the shoulder or foreleg and breast and skin. Then the worshippers divide up the flesh among themselves. No stranger may eat of it for it is holy. The intestines are cleansed, minced, cooked and eaten with unleavened bread. It is their sacrament. Each worshipper drinks a small cup of wine.

The procedure varies somewhat according to locality. There is no exact uniformity found in the details of procedure. Each district has something of its own in the way of observance. But in the main the order follows a general line which is the same everywhere. Nowhere is sacrifice spoken of as the propitiation of Heaven or of God by man. It is necessary to draw attention to this point. The Chiang know nothing of this heathen doctrine. According to their belief God does not require to be placated. They regard sacrifice as divine and celebrate it as such. The celebration they call "the paying of vows," for this represents their concern in it. For in paying their vows they pledge themselves to God's will and service, which is what God requires of man. He provides the sacrifice; they accept it by vowing to him their fidelity.

The remarkable thing is that bands of these men in the stillness and darkness of midnight meet to worship God in this way, and have done so for over two thousand years in West China. They believe they meet God here. He comes near to them in the person of their angel Je-Dsu. The light of the sacrificial fire, reflected in the glistening whiteness of their White Stone, symbolises His glory. It is their Shechinah. They cannot interpret this with the precision that we should wish, but they are under no two opinions that this sacrificial light represents to them the shining of the divine effulgence.

000 Here we Christians feel that we stand with them on holy ground and would willingly remove the shoes from our feet. Very solemn and awful is the floor on which they thus worship. Who dare call this litholatry? The man who would be utterly devoid of soul—a hopeless Canaanite in heart and mind.

St. John in his vision of things in Heaven was carried away in spirit to a great and high mountain, where he was shown the holy Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God and having the glory of God. Her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. The city had no need of

070 the light of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and The Lamb, (the slain Lamb) is the light thereof. An intelligent Chiang Christian reading this passage in the 21st chapter of the Book of Revelation has no need of any one to interpret it to him, he knows it after the manner born. The spiritual conceptions, the similes, the aspirations are his own. He understands perfectly how the light of the glory of God and of the Lamb is like unto a Stone, most precious, clear as crystal.

In the book of Zechariah where Joshua, the high priest, hears that Jehovah will bring forth His Servant the Branch and lay the Stone before Joshua when the iniquity of the land shall be removed in one day, the references for the common reader are very difficult to understand. It is not so with the Chiang. The Branch and the Stone are well known to him on his house-top, and the removal of iniquity in connection with them a periodic occurrence. From Genesis to Revelation the ritual of the White Religion of the Chiang bristles with points of similarity and great mutual illumination.

Take for instance Genesis, 31; 54, where it is said that Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread; and they did eat bread and tarried all night in the mount." What commentator can explain clearly the early usages that led him to do this? But we who have learnt how the Chiang sacrifice and tarry all night in the Mount have our difficulties cleared away. In their practices we see those of Genesis still preserved and observed. The Old Testament is a new book to us, comparatively, after we have sojourned for a time in the Chiang country. Their rocks, towers and fortresses give a vividness to many a Psalm and many a passage, that were previously half obscure to us.

796 Before the worshippers on the Mount separate the priest carefully divides the seed wheat between them, in which Je-Dsu had been planted in the likeness of death. The dividing in some parts is done by sowing. He scatters it over them like a sower when each one collects, what he can by lifting up a fold of his garment. The seed denotes the receiving of new life through death, i.e. by means of the sacrifice rendered to God. Each worshipper had taken to the grove four small white paper banners. Two of these are inserted in the fields and two taken home with the life seed, and preserved in a sacred receptacle called the *Choh-Ch'u*, which rests on a ledge in the corner of the main room of the house.

744 This sowing of seed takes place at marriages and at deaths.
585 It means re-creation and restoration . . . life beyond the tomb.
372 On the coffin a wooden bird typifies the flight of the soul to the Pure Land above. Heaven to them is the land of purity, therefore of gladness and brightness. The bride, after her marriage, lays aside her beautiful marriage attire, that she might wear it again
000 when she passes into this land of purity and of brightness. Among

070 a people whose religion is so much expressed in types and shadows the sentiment in this, as elsewhere, is very beautiful.

716 After the sacrifices, responsive singing, rejoicing and dancing are engaged in by all. The songs now sung are said to be very beautiful. For three days all work ceases. It is a period of festive joy before the Lord . . . a real Sabbath of rest and of gladness, pointing forward, of course, to its counterpart in the Heavens.

N. B. :—For further information regarding Chiang religion and customs see the author's pamphlet, "The History, Customs and Religion of the Chiang"; also article in the 1923 volume of the Journal of The North China Branch of The Royal Asiatic Society, "The Religion of The Chiang".

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